

Introduction

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The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography* derive from a one-day workshop held in April 2015 at the National Portrait Gallery, London, entitled 'George Scharf and the emergence of the museum professional in nineteenth-century Britain'.¹ Many have been worked up from papers presented on the day and further contributions have been sought from scholars whose work coincides closely with its theme. Organization of the event was prompted by new research into the professional practice of Sir George Scharf, the National Portrait Gallery's first secretary and director (1857–95). Whilst Scharf's career, along with those of a number of his contemporaries, had previously been considered in relation to the history of the public art institutions they helped to shape, little scholarly attention had been directed towards the identity of such figures as a discrete group of professionals or the manner in which they interacted. Papers explored the development of professional standards across individual careers, both in terms of research practice and the broader execution of gallery and museum procedures. Emphasis was also placed upon reconstructing networks of expert contacts and considering the potential for collaboration between colleagues, which sometimes extended beyond national boundaries and held implications for the evolution of museum practice in and outside of Britain. Indeed, contributions tested the theory that these officials - those centrally engaged in research, curatorship, conservation and management within public art galleries and museums - constituted an emerging professional group that had its roots in the second half of the nineteenth century, and whose identity was formalized in Britain with the establishment of the Museums Association in 1889.²

There is a substantial literature covering the consolidation of professions in the nineteenth century and the rise of professional classes over the period. Authors such as Harold Perkin, William Joseph Reader, Philip Elliott and Terence Gourvish have addressed the reform of roles falling within the traditional categories of the law, medicine and the church (as well the reorganization of the British military according to a more professional model) and the professionalization of a range of

¹ The staging of this event would not have been possible without a generous grant awarded by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, which was very much appreciated.

² Giles Waterfield notes that the creation of the Museums Association 'paralleled increasing professionalism in other fields'; Giles Waterfield, *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800–1914*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, 270. On the Museums Association see Geoffrey Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation: A Centenary History of the Museums Association*, London: Quillier Press, 1989.

newer occupations.³ Work has also been done to assess the growth of a number of specific related professions in the Victorian era, including that of the artist, the art critic and the historian.⁴ Relatively little has been published, however, on the professional subset forming the focus of this present issue.⁵ An important exception is Giles Waterfield's 2015 book *The People's Galleries Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800–1914*; this contains an interesting section on the 'uncertain' rise of the art curator in nineteenth-century museums and galleries, which the author contrasts with the more clearly defined function of the curator within a scientific museum.⁶ In a short chapter on the art curator James Hamilton likewise touches upon the evolving role, contrasting the early efforts of William Segurier at the National Gallery with the later approaches of the Gallery's 'pioneer scholar-curators', embodied by Ralph Nicholson Wornum and Charles Eastlake.⁷ It is hoped that the articles offered here go significantly further towards redressing the absence outlined above,

³ See Harold James Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880*, London; Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul; University of Toronto Press, 1969; Harold James Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, London; New York: Routledge, 1989; William Joseph Reader, *Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth Century England*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966; Philip Ross Courtney Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972; and Terence Richard Gourvish, 'The Rise of the Professions', in Gourvish and Alan O'Day eds, *Later Victorian Britain, 1867–1900*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988, 13–35. For an outline of the literature on nineteenth-century professional identity, and in particular how this pertains to Victorian artists, see Julie Codell, 'Professionalism: Authority and Agency', in *The Victorian Artist: Artists' life writings in Britain ca. 1870–1910*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 103–16.

⁴ See respectively: Paula Gillett, *The Victorian Painter's World*, Gloucester: Sutton, 1990; Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Aesthetic Value and the Professionalization of Victorian Art Criticism 1837–78', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2: 1, 1997, 71–94; and Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838–1886*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Furthermore, the nineteenth century trend towards professionalization has been a focus for various scholars in the history of science. See, for example, Samuel Alberti, 'Amateurs and professionals in one country: biology and natural history in later Victorian Yorkshire', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 34, 2001, 115–147, on the refashioning of amateur and professional roles in life sciences during this period.

⁵ In contrast, work has been done to assess the professionalization of curators within European and American art museums in the twentieth century. See especially Halona Norton-Westbrook, *Between The 'Collection Museum' and The University: The Rise of the Connoisseur-Scholar and the Evolution of Art Museum Curatorial Practice, 1900–1940*, PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2013. In her first chapter Norton-Westbrook similarly identifies the beginnings of professionalization amongst British museum officials in the later 1800s. See also Vera Zolberg on 'The Professional Era' in 'Conflicting Visions in American Art Museums', *Theory and Society*, 10: 1, 1981, 103–125; and Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008.

⁶ See Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, 266–71 and 17–18. The late Giles Waterfield was a valued participant in the 2015 workshop referenced in this Introduction, whose paper 'Emerging from the Chrysalis: curating the regional gallery in Victorian Britain' was based on material gathered in preparation for this book.

⁷ James Hamilton, *A Strange Business: Making Art and Money in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Atlantic Books, 2014, 255–85.

and build upon those existing histories of professionalization in the nineteenth century.

It is worth stressing again the point that this issue deals exclusively with developments in art museums. Articles concern individuals employed in undertaking art historical scholarship and executing museum practice exclusively within the public art museum or gallery.⁸ It is also necessary to note the deliberate use of the word 'emergence' in the title of this issue, selected with the intention of denoting the gradual or organic quality of this evolution. Indeed, there is no suggestion here that art museum officials were plotted on a course of conscious professional advancement, though these men were nonetheless participants in the larger phenomenon of 'professionalization' as can be identified in the nineteenth century across a range of occupations. The fact that these articles all focus on the careers of men is unfortunately symptomatic of the museum sector at this time, and a distinguishing feature of the subsequent scholarship surrounding it. However, Kate Hill's recent work *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* directly addresses this imbalance; Hill explores the difficulties experienced by women who tried to pursue traditionally 'masculine' careers in curatorship and assesses wider contributions made by women to the museum sphere.⁹

In gathering together these articles on the professional practice of individuals working in public art institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century, two characteristics become apparent. The first is a clear linking between the emergence of the museum professional during this period and contemporary developments in art historical scholarship, both in terms of literary output and in efforts made towards establishing a methodology for research. In Britain, art history as an academic discipline was not formalized until the third decade of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Before this, scholarly activity overwhelmingly occurred within the art museum, undertaken by employees or those closely associated with cultural institutions.¹¹ The implementation of professional standards in art museums and

⁸ Two obvious exceptions are the articles on Sidney Colvin and Augustus Wollaston Franks of the British Museum, who discharged their duties within a museum of art *and* antiquities.

⁹ See Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. Kate Hill presented a related paper entitled 'Women as Museum Professionals, c.1870–1914' and based on material generated for this book, at the 2015 workshop referenced in this Introduction.

¹⁰ On the establishment of the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1932, see Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art Contested Cultural Authority, 1890-1939*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010, 20. On the development of the discipline see Elizabeth Mansfield ed., *Art History and its Institutions: foundations of a discipline*, London: Routledge, 2002; and Udo Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, New York: Abaris Books, 1993.

¹¹ See James Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World from the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; and Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Duckworth, 2009. This was not exclusively the case; a number of figures arguably fundamental to the formation of the discipline in Britain were without institutional affiliation. See, for example, Adele Holcomb, 'Anna Jameson: The First Professional English Art Historian', *Art History*, 6: 2, 1983, 171–187.

galleries in the later 1800s - as demonstrated through approaches to displaying, interpreting, managing and conserving collections - went hand in hand with the application of an increasingly rigorous and evidenced-based approach to art historical research. The second characteristic is an acknowledgement of the centrality of networks of expertise to the success of individual endeavours. Common to these articles is a sense of the importance of specialist contacts (both national and international) to the work of the figures they discuss, and an exploration of the professional exchange and collaboration at play within each case study. Accordingly, the recurrence of names and relationships associated with this sphere is identifiable across the breadth of material presented here.

Eloise Donnelly contributes the first article in this issue, which explores the professional practice of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography at the British Museum. Focusing in particular on Franks's efforts to enrich the collection of medieval and Renaissance decorative art objects at the Museum, Donnelly argues that his appointment in 1851 marked a turning point away from a tradition of amateur collecting and towards a more deliberate and systematic approach to art curatorship. This is demonstrated through examples of Franks's innovations in relation to acquisition, conservation, scholarship and display. In highlighting his central position within a complex international network of scholars and museum officials on the one hand, and private collectors and connoisseurs on the other, Donnelly emphasises Franks's role in defining the very concept of the modern museum professional in later Victorian Britain.

The next two articles take as their subject the career of Sir George Scharf, director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, and close friend and colleague of Franks. Elizabeth Heath firstly considers Scharf's contribution to developments in art historical scholarship and its methodology during the nineteenth century, specifically his provision of a template for specialist British portraiture research. Secondly, Heath aims to reconstruct Scharf's circles of personal and official contacts, and highlights physical sites of social and professional interactions across the capital. She argues that as a result of informal exchange of expertise and collaborative working, Scharf and his contemporaries in the museum sector were engaged in outlining the guiding principles of their profession. Jacob Simon focuses upon Scharf's active interest in the conservation of the National Portrait Gallery's early collection and evaluates his practice in the context of changing attitudes towards conservation and restoration of pictures in public art collections during the second half of the nineteenth century. In drawing out examples of Scharf seeking advice from colleagues in other institutions, from professional picture restorers and from leading scientists (as well as offering his own knowledge on the subject), Simon underlines Scharf's access to a system of expert contacts that was to prove of direct advantage to his work for the Gallery.

Jessica Feather continues the issue with an article on Sir Sidney Colvin, specifically his keepership of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum between 1883 and 1912. She argues that during his tenure Colvin oversaw the deliberate introduction of a number of professionalizing reforms within the department. These included the recruitment of a band of university-trained historians as curators, and the implementation of new standards for art historical

scholarship in the form of a pioneering cataloguing project. Feather also considers the function of the Prints and Drawings study room as a site for networking and collaboration; a space in which Colvin took care to nurture a range of professional contacts.

Moving the discussion away from its focus on incumbents of the British Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, Elena Greer examines the career of Sir Frederic William Burton, the third director of the National Gallery in London and the last to hold executive power over the purchasing of art works for the collection. Greer considers the precise expertise that Burton brought to the role, contrasting his artist-antiquarian skill set with the traditional attributes of the 'painter-connoisseur' director and proposing that Burton applied a more scholarly and scientific approach to the execution of his curatorial duties. Whilst acknowledging that reactions to Burton's method were mixed (amongst National Gallery Trustees and in the periodical press), Greer stresses nonetheless the significance of his work in relation to the evolving discipline of art history in Britain across the final three decades of the century.

The following two articles concern the career of Sir John Charles Robinson, both during and immediately after his relatively brief but influential tenure at the South Kensington Museum. Charlotte Drew considers Robinson's vital part in securing the Museum's international renown, through his ground-breaking scholarship on the early decorative arts collections, the extensive collecting networks that he established and maintained, and his innovative display strategies within South Kensington's exhibition spaces. By investigating the varied responsibilities that made up Robinson's position as the Museum's first curator, Drew argues for his significant role in the evolution of modern British museum practice. She further acknowledges Robinson's status - like Franks at the British Museum - as a crucial point of intersection between public and private collecting realms. This is a crossover that Elizabeth Pergam also stresses in her article, which takes as a case study the Paris sale of Robinson's personal art collection in 1868, following his contentious departure from the South Kensington Museum. As well as analyzing this event in detail, Pergam uses it to shed new light on the nature of Robinson's dismissal and to introduce broader ideas relating to his standing as a public museum professional, his contribution to art historical scholarship and his approach to art curatorship. She also contends that it was the results of Robinson's activity as a private collector, including his art market expertise and multiple contacts amongst European collectors and dealers, which held direct implications for the calibre of art works he was able to secure for the Museum's collection.

Deborah Stein shifts the emphasis away from individuals working in British institutions through her assessment of the influence of British museum practice further afield, specifically the case of Charles Callahan Perkins and his work as founding director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts between 1869 and 1886. Stein suggests that Perkins's ambition to establish a collection of early Italian art in Boston was directly linked to the central concern of British galleries during this period, with systematically representing the historical progression of art. She cites as particular inspiration the work of John Charles Robinson at the South Kensington Museum, and George Scharf in his early incarnation as art secretary of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. Moreover, in investigating the nature of Perkins's

writings on Italian art and interventions at the Boston Museum, Stein positions him in relation to the wider development of the art historical discipline as manifested through art museum display and scholarship throughout nineteenth-century Europe.

Continuing with the related theme of professional exchange and collaboration across national boundaries, Susanna Avery-Quash and Corina Meyer present a co-authored article on the early friendship between art historian Johann David Passavant and artist Sir Charles Eastlake, who were to become directors of the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt and the National Gallery in London respectively. Through an interrogation of extant correspondence between the pair dating from the 1840s, Avery-Quash and Meyer examine the manner of their exchange and how they shared specialist knowledge and ideas about early northern art and its technique. They are able to demonstrate that, by working together, Passavant and Eastlake developed a methodology for art historical research, which inflected their scholarly outputs as well as Eastlake's future innovations as an art museum official. Lucy Hartley further underlines the importance of Eastlake's work at the National Gallery within the rapidly shifting public museum world of the mid-nineteenth century. She firstly undertakes an analysis of what she terms Eastlake's 'professional aesthetic' and secondly considers how Eastlake applied his artistic, connoisseurial and scholarly expertise to his official positions as keeper and director, especially in the areas of acquisition and display. Hartley not only contends that Eastlake aimed to transform the study of art in Britain through his adoption and expansion of German principles of art historical scholarship and museum practice, she argues for his instrumental role in instigating broader changes to art institutions throughout the nation.

Anne Galastro concludes this issue with an article on the professional endeavours of William Borthwick Johnstone at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh. As the Gallery's first keeper and principal curator, Johnstone was responsible for organizing and presenting the nascent collection upon its opening to the public in 1859. In exploring his approach to these duties, Galastro seeks to situate Johnstone in the context of contemporary debates surrounding the most efficient means of arranging pictures in public art galleries. She proposes that his work reflects both an adherence to traditional methods and a deliberate engagement with new ideas on hanging collections, based on a more scholarly and didactic model.

The eleven contributions in this issue help explore the emergence of the art museum professional in nineteenth-century Britain, an area of developing interest that would benefit from further research.

Elizabeth Heath has recently completed an AHRC-funded collaborative PhD with the National Portrait Gallery, London and the University of Sussex. Her thesis investigates the professional practice of the National Portrait Gallery's first director Sir George Scharf (1820–95). It is the first focused analysis of Scharf's career and influence within the nineteenth-century art and museum worlds. Elizabeth has previously held curatorial and research positions at the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, Leighton House Museum and with Art UK.

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